

“The Wreck”
or
That Sinking Feeling...

Treatment for a 1920s melodrama staged ‘on location’
in the Cape Byron lighthouse precinct*
7/12/2012

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(Photo *Time and Tide*)

Figure 1. The S.S. Wollongbar washed up on Bilongil Beach,
Byron Bay, circa May 1921.

*Based on the workshop: ‘Fieldnotes for Performance’ by Noelle Janaczewska
Held at the Geoffrey Rush Theatre, University of Queensland 23/8/2012

Miranda.

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea mounting to the welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those I saw suffer ! A brave vessel,
Who had no doubt some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces ! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perish'd...

Prospero

Be collected;
No more amazement ; tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done...
The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touch'd
The very virtue of compassion in thee,
I have with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered that there is no soul—
No, not so much perdition as an hair
Betide to any creature in the vessel
Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink.

The Tempest. Act I Scene II

Background

Like the shipwreck in *The Tempest*, there was no loss of life when the mini-liner, the S.S. Wollongbar, pride of the North Coast Steam Navigation Company, foundered off Bilongil beach in Byron Bay on the wild and stormy night of the 14th of May, 1921. Fortunately, only its cargo of butter, bacon and bananas was lost.

“Wollongbar” is a local, Bundjalung word meaning “hole in the ground” and was clearly not a very propitious title for modern steamships, given that the Wollongbar II, quickly built in Scotland as a replacement for the ill fated Wollongbar I, was also sunk, this time by a Japanese torpedo off Crescent Head in 1942.

Shakespeare’s play was similarly inspired by an actual shipwreck,¹ and like many lighthouse stories, *That Sinking Feeling* also involves at its core, a pivotal and troubled relationship between a father and his (wayward, headstrong, brave, independent, self-willed) daughter.²

This project is projected to encompass a merging of ‘tourist-theatre’ with site-specificity in performance practice. Over time, the play could be remounted to coincide with peak holiday seasons, and become, like many popular location plays, ultimately self-supporting (think London’s *Mousetrap*). The intention here is to fashion a 1920s style melodrama (think Noel Coward), and produce it in a building authentically related to that time and story. In this way *That Sinking Feeling* would take its audiences of traveller/tourists on a (literal) journey back through Byron’s remarkably colourful history to the night of one of its most dramatic events: the foundering of the S.S. Wollongbar off Bilongil beach. Here the ship’s structural skeleton, known locally as “the Wreck”, remains today like a waterlogged ‘ghost vessel’ – an uncanny from the past that continues to haunt an unknowing present... *That Sinking Feeling* seeks to lift the veil and produce a more knowing audience...

¹ In Shakespeare’s case (and in another demonstration of how the conquest and occupation of space in the New World furnished the imagination of the Elizabethans), the *Tempest* is said to have been inspired by the 1609 wreck of the Sea Venture, carrying the newly appointed Governor of Virginia, Sir Thomas Gates, to his posting in the North American colony. Fortunately, his honour was later found alive and well, washed up and semi-marooned in the Bermudas. This connection is outlined in *Shakespeare’s Comedies* Peter Alexander ed. London. Collins. 1951: 27. Print.

² Despite the title, *That Wreck* as a new site-specific play, will be more a combination of House and Bus Shows than anything relating specifically to action on boats. My current doctoral research into TheatreWorks’ location plays of the 1980s and their implications for theatre practice going forward convinces me that site-specific theatre today stands on the cusp of some exciting breakthroughs. It offers the ‘art of theatre’ novel and popular ways for engaging audiences across a range of senses and sensitivities, providing experiences unmatched by mechanically or digitally reproduced drama (film internet etc.).

EXEGESIS

In addition to discoveries made in the course of my research for *Really Moving Drama*,³ the idea for *That Sinking Feeling*, and its potential staging strategies, also derive from a workshop conducted by Noelle Janaczewska at the University of Queensland in August 2012. This looked at creating performance from ‘writerly’ investigations into landscape.

In her introductory notes to the workshop, Noelle drew attention to the notion of ‘psychogeography’ which she “think[s] of as the writer as walker”⁴. In a web published example of psychogeography, Will Self describes a plane trip from London to Glasgow with amusing complaints every traveller will recognise, offering self-reflexive moments superimposed over an meditation on the nature of plane travel.⁵ W.G. Sebald’s novel, *The Rings of Saturn*, also recommended by Noelle, is essentially a long and rambling walk through coastal East Anglia, whose various buildings and landscapes project the walker/subject into a range of interconnectivities between history, people and place.

These two examples of “writers walking” provide a strategy for enacting a site-specific play in the present moment, while locating its narrative heterotopia and, what Foucault would call its associated ‘heterochrony’,⁶ in another time period. Psychogeography potentially therefore, allows an audience to view (re)enacted historical events through the lens of the present (as created by actor/guides in character and framed by the found architecture of the place of performance).

Joanne Tompkins notes that *Suitcase*,⁷ a play notionally set in the 1930s, was produced quite successfully in present day Liverpool Street Station, London. The play commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Kindertransport, the emergency evacuation of Jewish children out of Nazi Germany just prior to the Second World War. The performance presented the stories of some of those children who passed through this very station (in the 1930s timeframe), while the busy modern transport hub continues to swirl around them. Here is a site specific work in which, as Tompkins shows, the intercalation of distinct historical moments *into*

³ Davies, Paul. *Really Moving Drama*. Brisbane: University of Queensland: Fryer Library 2013. PhD Thesis (pending). This thesis principally focuses on TheatreWorks location plays of the 1980s

⁴ Janaczewska, Noelle “Fieldnotes for Performance” 23/8/2012. TS. In my personal case, the fieldnotes for *That Sinking Feeling* derive from the writer as cyclist.

⁵ Self, Will. Psychogeography – London to Glasgow, *The Independent*, London 29/12/2007. Available on line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/columnists/will-self/will-self-psychogeography--london-to-glasgow-766092.html> (accessed 28/11/2012)

⁶ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16. Spring (1986): 22-27. Print.

⁷ Tompkins, Joanne. Theatre's Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of *Suitcase* *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 56. 2 [T214] (2012 Summer): 101-112.

the present, becomes not only possible and plausible, but as a result of the disjunction of these temporal and narrative overlays and correspondences, *actually heightens* the temporal and placial resonances – adding to, and enhancing the total experience.

The notion of psychogeography derives from a group of left intellectuals and activists known as the Situationist International, and is best expressed in the work of Guy Debord. His idea of “constructing situations” is something which resonates with current site-specific theatre practice.⁸ It seems perfectly in keeping that the Situationist International can itself trace a genealogy back to the radical occupations of public and private spaces conducted under the banners of Dada and Futurism, and became a key ideological player itself in *les événements de May 1968*.

The challenge with *That Sinking Feeling* will be to fashion the subjectivity of its audience as “witnesses” to the historical events the play seeks to portray. A further reference suggested by Noelle, is Tim Etchells’ *Certain Fragments*, an account of his company Forced Entertainment, the British site-specific group best known for its Bus Show, *Nights in This City*. Etchells notes that the formation of the idea of witness is “present everywhere in the contemporary performance scene” and “leaves us above all, unable to stop thinking, talking, reporting what we’ve seen...borne on by our responsibility to events”(18).⁹ *Nights in This City* (and its predecessor in Melbourne, Rod Quantock’s *Bus, Son of Tram*) offers a solution to the problem of getting the audience up to the lighthouse (with its limited parking space) and also an opportunity to engage in the psychogeographic exercise of having a tour guide/character overlay the passing landscape with descriptions of how it used to be, including the recounting of certain key incidents: the destruction of the two jetties, an attack by a pack of sharks leaping “like AFL players” at the strips of blubber hanging off harpooned whales as they’re hauled ashore. Then the sharks turn on each other as they are hit by bullets fired by a whaler with a rifle, shooting into the pack to discourage them from destroying the Humpback...

This brief overview of the town’s history could also touch on the radio-toxic legacy of sandmining, and the equally calamitous use of DDT in the cattle industry. There are stories about the many burnings down and rebuildings of the many hotels, of the night a humpback whale slithered down the main street, having slipped off a railway wagon – adding considerably to the already heightened dislocation of drinkers exiting the nearby Pier Hotel.

A short (mobile) history of ‘The Bay’

⁸ See Guy Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1994.

⁹ Etchells, Tim. *Certain Fragments Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print. Etchells refers specifically to the characters in Brecht’s poem who are witnesses to a traffic accident and stand around discussing what happened (18).

The initial ride up to the lighthouse therefore, provides a lens for uncovering Byron's diverse and at times, bizarre history. The account would start with its evolution as a Dreamtime Eden for the Bundjalung, through to the era of colonial exploitation and deforestation, the spread of the banana and dairy farms across a formerly pristine rainforest, appearing in patches first cleared by the cedar getters. This was quickly followed by an economic crisis when those soils were quickly depleted. Always, there is the boom/bust economy. This includes the coming and the closing of the economies of whaling and sandmining. Mainly the cattlemen prospered. But later their abattoir sites would be ritually cleansed by a Buddhist monk and new era would dawn in the bay. This saw the coming of alternative 'lifestylers' with their counter-cultural ambitions, and their dreams of self-sustainability. Here was an era of once again (following in an ancient local tradition), of treading lightly on the landscape. Alas, this (re)discovery of the magic within the place in itself triggered another era of excessive success, destroying the whole point of being 'here' in the first place. This is present era of the young traveller, the 'backpackers' who arrive by their hundreds in an age of jumbo jets. And so once again, a delicate balance is shifting out of kilter... the dream clouds again.

One question framing this inquiry as a dramatic work might then be: at what point and for what reasons, does a local community attitude shift from that of exploitation (the era of colonialism) back to nurture and regeneration (the era of self-sustainability, pre- and post-colonial). Thus, the attitudes of the characters in the play, at the historical moment of 1921, can be display micro examples of the larger shift in social attitudes. This includes outspoken female characters influence by the emerging feminist consciousness of the suffragette movement (in essence over women's right to vote). In this way the audience might even be taken down a moral path.

As Etchells points out in his account of Forced Entertainment's Bus Show

Nights In This City (1995) was a guided tour of the city [Sheffield] with its audience and performers on board a bus – a guided tour which avoided facts in search of a different truth. Slipping through the centre of the city and out of control – off the beaten path, playing always to the difference between on-route and off-route, centre and periphery, legitimate and illegitimate. Playing always to the different histories written in urban space – the official historical, the personal, the mythical and the whole city as a sounding board. (80-81)

All this and more is possible with such an iconic and historically significant place like Byron Bay. The 'guide character' in *That Sinking Feeling*, a key player in moulding and maintaining the community of the audience, is Dorothy "Dotty" Hunter, the wife of the Main Lighthouse Keeper, a spiritualist and leading member of the local Theosophical Society, with an uncanny ability to channel key figures from the past along with their memories of Byron's earlier days. 'Dotty' by name and dotty by nature, her waywardly guided tour up to the lighthouse precinct becomes a kind of mobile 'séance which carries the audience from the mundane via the historical, up to the "special world" at the top of the cape: the heterotopia of May 14, 1921.

Equally, the bus trip back down to town at the end of the performance can function as a kind of epilogue to the events just witnessed in and around the Lighthouse, an accounting by Dotty again of how the characters all ended up, a kind of future projection on to the site-specific narrative just witnessed, offering the wisdom of hindsight. This circularity of bus trips up and back, the rounding of the narrative journey with a literal journey, in a sense mimics the circularity of the turning light beam itself, an emblem of both unconditional protection (providing safety for all) and of ‘enlightenment’ in all its forms and connotations, the symbolic source of something higher and other.

The Lighthouse



(Photo: Annette Flotwell)
Figure 2. Cape Byron Lighthouse

A concrete block tower built in 1901 (the same year as the federation of the Australian Colonies), Cape Byron’s iconic lighthouse features widely on innumerable cards, posters and photographic representations of the town. Its light shines through French crystal set in British steel, currently boasting the strongest light beam in Australia. The mechanism which weights a total of four and half tons is too heavy to stop so it is kept constantly turning in a bed of 850 pounds of mercury.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ryan, Maurice and Robert Smith. *Time and Tide Again, A History of Byron Bay*. Lismore: Northern Rivers Press 2001. Print. 59.

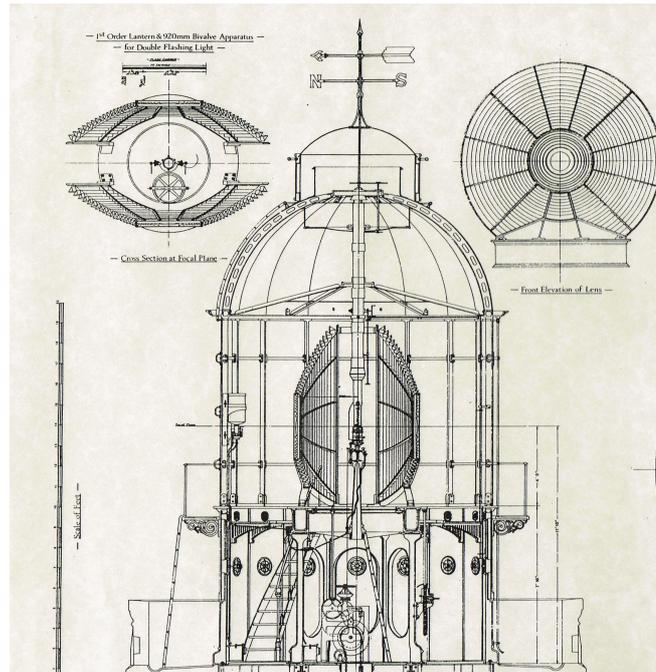


Figure 3. Elevation plan of Cape Bryon Lighthouse showing light mechanism and circular balcony
NSW Dept of Public Works. (National Archives of Australia; A10182,CN 02 047)

Performatively speaking, the lighthouse building offers balcony spaces for the formal addresses (by a superior class) as if looking down from a symbolic castle (with its faux parapets), onto a crowd gathered below. Internally, two small rooms frame a remarkable spiral staircase, as well as a circular external parapet at the top. Off to one side is the signal box building which housed the flags used for semaphore signalling (also a possible site for dramatic action).

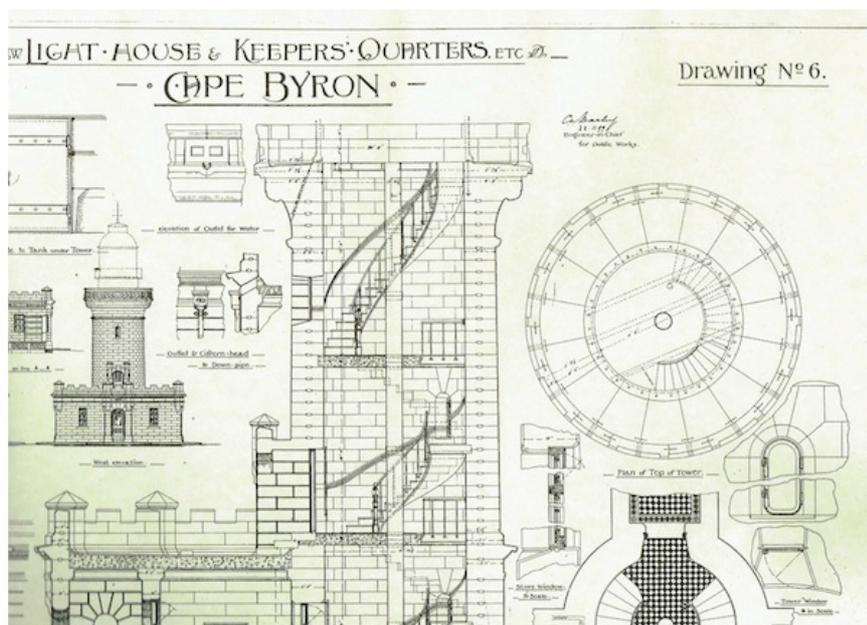


Figure 4. Cape Byron light house interior showing the circular stairwell, including side elevations and plan view of tower. (National Archives)

Byron Bay in 1921 ¹¹



Figure 5. Byron Bay circa 1921.

Byron Bay in 1921 seems reminiscent of some small, recently built town in the American West. I imagine the five musicians (centre left) still carrying their instruments (having just arrived on the Wollongbar from Sydney), are taking a stroll down the main street looking for refreshment or accomdation, or the pub where they're going to play....

At the time in which the play is set (1921) the town of Byron Bay had a population of 1700 with another 3000 in the surrounding district.¹² Thanks to its jetty and a relatively calm, north-facing bay, it had become a major sea port on the New South Wales Coast. However it still lacked basic infrastructure such as electricity, decent roads, sewerage etc. It was essentially a pretty shabby industrial town with a working class population to service the local dairy factories, sawmills and abattoirs. There was some small tourist activity catered to by the various hotels, but the town was a long way from becoming the tourist Mecca that it is today. The period setting of the play would be established through performative style (a melodrama typical of the period) as well of course, by costumes worn by the cast as well as the 'set design' of the Main Cottage's rooms – the building itself being innately historically authentic.

¹¹ For most of the historical references here I draw on *Time and Tide*.

¹² *Time and Tide*. 67.

Staging strategies for relating story (shipwreck/daughter) to place (lighthouse).

As outlined in my research for *Really Moving Drama*, authenticity (spatial relations) and complicity (audience relations) are key elements in creating the diegetic (or narrative) world of any site-specific play. This fabricated social space, in line with Foucault's (and later Heathertington's) notion of the heterotopia, works as a place of 'alternate ordering' by being both permeable and contained at the same time.¹³ I argue that what location theatre demonstrates for heterotopia is how the balance of these opposites can be kept in play by mobility (of audience or stage or both).

The Cape Bryon light house can therefore be *authentically* engaged as a site of action for the sinking of any ship in the Bay in 1921. Actors extend the connection by mimicking the mores and protocols of early Twentieth Century settler behaviour in a play based on a typical drama style of the time (melodrama). The *complicity* of the audience in the sinking of the Wollongbar is initially shaped by their historically layered bus ride to the site, and then conditioned by their investment on arrival as fellow guests at an engagement party of the lighthouse keeper's daughter. Here the narrative of the play taps into a common literary and cinematic trope: that of the courageous young woman who keeps the lighthouse flame alive in the constrained absence of her father.¹⁴

¹³ Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. London: Routledge, 1997. Print. 8-9.

¹⁴ Examples include, not only the *Tempest* but feature films such as Willy Rozier's *Manina, The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* (1952) – Brigitte Bardot's first starring role – and more recently, the Australian feature, Shirley Barette's *South Solitary* (2010). Arielle North Olson's best selling children's book, *The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* (illus. Elaine Wentworth. Mystic Seaport. Mystic CT. 2004), one of the best known versions of the trope is based on true events where a young girl kept the light burning in a lighthouse off the coast of Maine while her father, the keeper, was kept away by a violent storm.



(Illustration: Elaine Wentworth)

Figure 6. *The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* from the children's story by Arielle North Olson (1987)



Figure 7. John Tarahetteff's "The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter" (2009)
A surreal visual interpretation of the lighthouse daughter trope.



Figure 8. Willy Rozier's *Manina, the Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* (1952, 86 mins.)

This was Brigitte Bardot's first major screen role.

The lighthouse-daughter trope often involves shipwrecks and wild storms, and the complication of a fraught relationship with an outsider/sailor/shipwreck survivor (of which Shakespeare's *Tempest* may also be read as distant narrative cousin)¹⁵. All of which is made worse by the overbearing presence of the father. Thus the trope often assumes a headstrong daughter's inability to cope with the adjacent 'normal' society of the town and/or her father's equally headstrong nature. A more recent example is the Australian Film, *South Solitary* (Shirley Barrett 2009).

King Lear also bears some resemblance in the father/daughter conflict aspect.



Figure 9. Poster for *South Solitary* (Shirley Barrett. 120 mins. 2009). Co-incidentally, this version of the trope is also set in the 1920s.

Treatment

Within the lighthouse precinct the audience will be welcomed by the senior lighthouse keeper (Capt. Henry Hunter [ret.]) and invested as invitees to the engagement party of his daughter Lucinda (recently of Sydney) to Reginald Wareham Esq. (of nearby Suffolk Park). We learn that Reg is currently a supercargo on the S.S. Wollongbar and is soon to be made assistant lighthouse keeper to Capt. Hunter here at the Cape Byron lighthouse. This public service position provides a secure financial underpinning to the proposed nuptials. Needless to say, the parents are very happy with the arrangement but as the play shows, the daughter is most emphatically *not*.

Fieldnote Oct. 14 2012: On one trip (cycle) up to the lighthouse I consider the potential of placing this formal welcoming speech on the balcony of the lighthouse, with Captain Hunter using an acoustic megaphone and having Reg as his semaphore signaller ‘texting’ the speech with flags and wild arm movements. This has comic potential in the *commedia* tradition and will help technologically reinforce the heterochrony of 1921. Right from the start, the vaguely castle-like structure of the balcony (Figure 2) allows us to impose the Keeper as a colonially dominant and formal figure, looking down on his guests (subjects) from high above. I turn and look out across the bay to the township itself stretched out along

the coast below and imagine bells ringing out in a time of crisis, a storm, a ship being wrecked on the beach! We would expect an animated crowd gathering next to the jetty, lifesavers, the police, children absconding from their bedrooms, all transfixed by the unfolding accident. Some might flock to the jetty as voyeurs, some hurry there to help. And so we introduce another form of pre-digital, communication: town and church bells, warning bells. Soundscapes projected across landscapes. The sound folds the community together into the crisis. In the same way, the lighthouse itself, (from the point of view of standing below it looking back at the town), seems to draw the land to this point on the peak of the cape. 'Cavanbah', its Bundjalung name, means "meeting place". Then and now, a meeting place for people from disparate groups; originally for the two northern branches of the Bundjalung nation, and today for backpackers from all the nations on earth (if the accents in Woolies are any guide). I wonder if we could convince a restaurant or someone at one of the churches, to ring a bell at the same time each night –All in aid of the psychogeographic illusion?

From Capt. Hunter's formal welcome speech (with toasts proposed and reciprocated), the audience are taken down to Capt. and Mrs. Hunter's cottage to be inducted as 'guests' into the party proper. At the main door each audience member is given a fictional name drawn from the family names of known settlers in the district at this time. These 'guests' are announced to the party generally by Molly who is standing by the front door for this purpose. Here the play would draw on staging strategies deployed in other 'House Shows' as discussed in Chapter 6 of *Really Moving Drama*¹⁶.

Fieldnote: October 17, 2012: On another cycle to the lighthouse I buy plans for the Keeper's cottages on sale at the National Parks' tourist shop inside the cottage itself. Here I am able to measure and count the rooms available for a performance in the Main Cottage. Conscious of the need to maximise audience numbers, I calculate that we are confronted by six medium sized rooms (three on either side of a central hallway) with each room capable of seating about 15 to 20 people around the walls (as in *Living Rooms*).

¹⁶ Davies, Paul. *Really Moving Drama*. Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2013. PhD Thesis (pending).

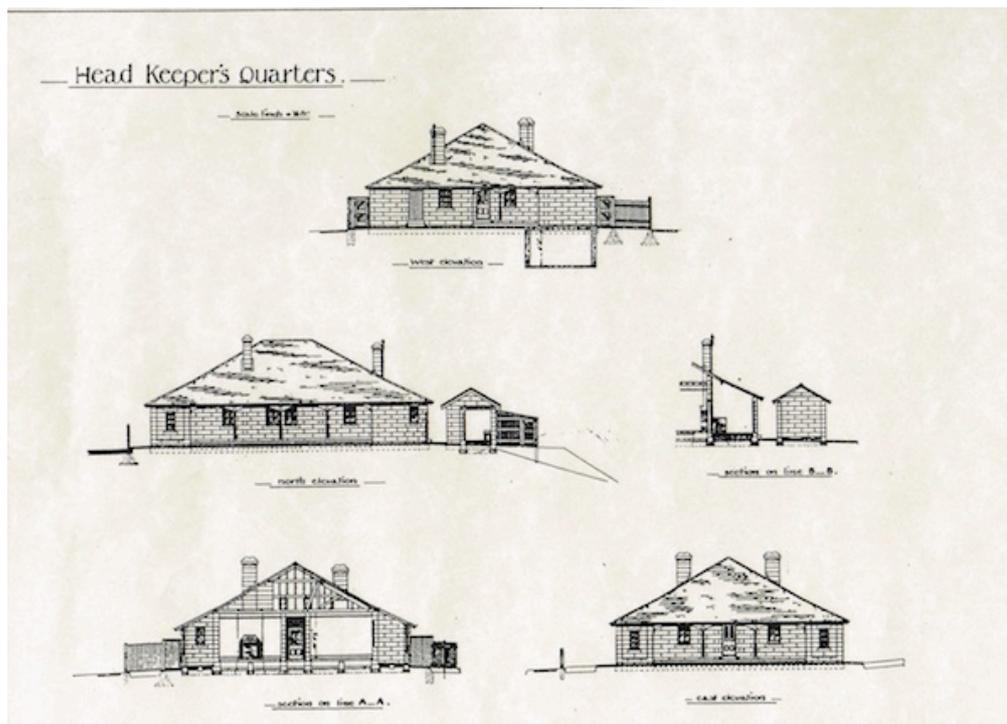


Figure 10. Side Elevations of the Main Lighthouse Keeper's Cottage at Cape Byron. (National Archives)

The architectural style is in the manner of a settler cottage of the time (1901), authenticating story with place.

Site-specific staging strategies for creating the diegetic heterotopia (space of the story).

This architectural template of the main lighthouse keepers cottage gives the production an audience of roughly 80 -100 people, divided into four or five sub-groups and sequestered at any given time into several of six possible rooms. The problem of how to fashion the subjectivity of the audience as guests at a 1920s' engagement party raises the possibility of formally dividing them into separate groups as in *Living Rooms* or allowing them to follow individual characters through the story as it were, by literally following them *through* the house as such. This was the spatial strategy deployed by Necessary Angel's production in 1981 of John Krizanc's *Tamara*. I'm proposing here a kind of third option: less formal than *Living Rooms*, but also less random and anarchic than *Tamara*. This would involve deploying the strategies of any social gathering (party) where information exchanges can be dispersed across discrete groups of people— usually focused around key, expressive individuals. These groupings within the larger gathering of the party would allow the rooms to be occupied as 'performative 'cells' in which subsets of the audience would be gathered for each Act and thus be in a position to 'overhear' the dialogue much like conversations at a party. These short scripted exchanges (scenes) would be of around four to five minutes duration. Such scenes could be repeated in different rooms so that all the audience become party to parts of the narrative – but perhaps not the whole story. To satisfy Tim Etchells' notion

of fashioning ‘witnesses’ to the action, I imagine the role of the audience as partly voyeurs and partly ‘ghosts’ who are present but not totally visible to the actor/characters. Sounds (shouting, music, bells) would also carry from room to room and occasionally draw the focus to what’s going on in the house as a whole (and the performance as a kind of meta event).

Thus scripted (and repeated conversations) would take place between characters as they moved from room to room and (re)appear in different couplings. Perhaps sometimes they would appear singly – performing monologues, effectively. At the end of each short scene characters would exit a room to be replaced by another coupling from the basic mix of dramatis personae (father, mother, daughter, fiancé, daughter’s best friend etc.). Thus scenes between mother and daughter, father and daughter, daughter and fiancé, daughter and best friend, fiancé and father, will take place in each room and be repeated by the actors as they carry these scenes around the four ‘performative cells’. Such exchanges taking place in each of four (or five) rooms would require a core cast of at least eight or nine. And again, like *Tamara* not everybody in the audience might view the same set of events, or even get a complete picture of the story in one attendance. Such an outcome with *Tamara* lead to the phenomenon of many people making multiple attendances to cover for themselves, the narrative gaps.

Temporally speaking, each of the three main Acts in the keeper’s cottage therefore, (with its sub-sets of four, five-minute scenes), exists with its own separate heterochrony. At the end of the First Act (the initial sequence of four/five scenes), audience groups swap rooms and a Second Act again unfolds as various couplings within the core cast, effectively building on narrative information already supplied in the sequences of the First Act. Breaks between Acts allow the heterochronic clock to be reset as audience subgroups mingle throughout the house to share gossip, speculate on outcomes, create mischief, even perhaps to reshape themselves into a differently composed audience sub-group for the Second Act. The Third Act concludes with the major dramatic crisis – the sinking of the Wollongbar. A Final (Fourth) Act, reveals the dramatic effect of the sinking on everyone concerned. As with other House Shows examined in *Really Moving Drama*, the audience will continue to be present as ‘guests’ but also, in a sense, their subjectivity is fashioned as voyeurs. They become privy to certain backstories, and therefore begin to view the events of the play from something approaching the perspective of Etchells’ ‘witnesses’—engaging the moral imperative as they accumulate knowledge of characters and their various intentions – all of whom will have secrets to hide that become their points of vulnerability. The characters will also express confidentially certain irresistible desires (while clearly overheard by others).

Narrative could also be conveyed through an engagement with certain ‘parlour games’ appropriate to the social mores of the early 1920s (see further research). I am wondering here about the origins of ‘charades’ for example, or ‘blind man’s bluff’. Séances were also popular that this time as was singing familiar songs round a piano (sing-a-longs) – all strategies for moulding sub-sets within the various audience groups, and thereby further containing and manipulating the social mix within each room. Such engagements also dissolve the barriers between actor and spectator (without needing to go so far as creating August

Boal's 'spectators').¹⁷ Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner both explored these proximal relationships in dedicated theatre laboratories.¹⁸ Here their experiments can be applied to performances in the real world.

Narratively speaking, the crisis of the storm (enhanced by sound effects and incoming wet costumes), and the consequent foundering of the S.S. Wollongbar on the beach below, will draw all audience groups outside to a critical emergency response scene. Ideally this penultimate scene would be set inside the lighthouse building itself and thereby offers a panoptic view of the unfolding maritime drama. We can fictionally speculate that the lighthouse, with its commanding view and its communication systems (primitive as they were), would have been a major focal point for any response by the local emergency services (life saving, fire, ambulance, police and shipping crews). In a 1920's Australian country town, without a basic electricity service, primitive phones and telegraph machines, large bells and signal flags fill the communication gap.

Here again, in this crisis scene, our audience (like the formation of 'witnesses' Tompkins observes happening in *Suitcase*), enact for themselves a process of psychogeography. This enables them to impose their own interpretation of the historical events of the play onto the present day landscape. Their view of real and imagined events below the lighthouse can be shaped by the 'actor/guides' in character.

Dramatis Personae

In the tradition of TheatreWorks' location practices, and especially given the rapid entrances and exits required to keep the momentum of the dramatic events rotating through the various rooms of the cottage, I would again cast the characters in the style of the *commedia della'arte*, with the familiar ensemble of larger-than-life archetypes: the irascible, but hopeless 'capitano' (Captain Hunter), the quartet of Innamorati (Lucinda, Berny, Reg, and Monroe), the zannis creating mischief (Molly and the Musicians), the grand but deluded dame (Mrs. Hunter). In this sense *commedia della'arte* merges with melodrama.

In the best traditions of the melodrama the characters will also carry a debilitating secret, to be revealed at the worst possible moment and embellished by gossip spread throughout the play. Again, well within the *commedia* tradition, characters (especially the Innamorati) will manifest passionate but conflicting desires at cross purposes to their real intentions (Lucinda for Berny, Reg for Lucinda, Monroe for Lucinda, Molly for Monroe etc.).

Captain John Hunter (ret.). Late 50s/early 60s (but looks older). John Hunter ran away from school to sea at fourteen and for a time sailed with the 'last pirate', a real life scoundrel named Bully Hayes. Hayes, an American, was immortalised

¹⁷ See Boal, Augusto. *The Rainbow of Desire, the Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print. 42.

¹⁸ See Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen & Co, 1968. Print. And Schechner, Richard. *Environmental Theatre*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973. Print.

in the short stories of Louis Becke who himself sailed with Hayes and was regarded as the first Australian writer to focus on the Pacific cultures and the impact of European colonial expansion into them. This association with Hayes is Captain Hunter's secret, his current pompous, upper class façade is revealed as a sham once the true facts are known. With Hayes (like Becke), Hunter was actually implicated in running guns to both sides of the Samoan Civil War and supplied slave labour (known as 'kanakas') to the Queensland cane fields. Many of these crimes will be drawn from Becke's own stories, especially his first and best known collection, *By Reef and Palm*.¹⁹

Lucinda Hunter. 30-ish. Capt. Hunter's daughter. Lucinda, is the 'bright spark' around which the action of the play unfolds. Like many lighthouse children Lucinda was sent to boarding school rather than have her education suffer on account of the isolation of lighthouse life. In Byron at last, she was able to go by pony to the local primary school where her life-long friendship with Berny (Berenice Armstrong) started. Their separation due to Lucinda's later boarding school absence in Sydney, was filled by a regular and passionate correspondence. After completing secondary school Lucinda stayed in the city where she worked as a seamstress and later in a more white-collar job as the secretary for a medium sized law firm. Here she soon fell in with the fast crowd, relishing Sydney in the roaring twenties. This was a time of hedonism and the inevitable relaxation of social behaviours in the wake of the First World War. This climate of change allowed certain 'liberated' women to challenge the contemporary patriarchal paradigm. It is partly to redirect her life from this 'wayward' path that her parents (particularly her father) have pushed Lucinda into the engagement to Reginald. However, in the tradition of the lighthouse daughter trope she is strong willed, passionate, independent, capable and somewhat driven.

Reginald Wareham Esq. Early 40s. Reg is at least ten years older than Lucinda and the son of settler parents. The Warehams were virtually 'given' hundreds of acres of Bundjalung land in a government handout to the better class of convict and other free settlers around 1860-70.²⁰ Reg has recently been a supercargo on the S.S. Wollongbar (an overseer/account role relating to the documentation of cargo— Becke himself worked as such for Bully Hayes). Reg is also unusual in that he seems to have survived the War (World War 1) without any visible or invisible scars. Yet he is nudging middle age and has never married. He is a decent enough fellow and is truly concerned for and affectionate towards Lucinda, behaving at all times with perfect respect and attention. Unsurprisingly, Lucinda recoils from what she sees as his dull, plodding, settler mentality and couldn't

¹⁹ Becke, Louis. *By Reef And Palm*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1955. Print. See also Becke, Louis *Bully Hayes: Buccaneer*. Sydney: NSW Bookstall Co., 1913. Print. There is a major scholarly work on Becke by A. Grove Day: *Louis Becke*. Melbourne: Hill of Content, 1967. Print. Personally, Becke is a distant relative being an uncle of my paternal grandfather Colwyn Davies. By the end of the 19th Century Becke was regarded as the 'Rudyard Kipling of the Pacific' (A. Grove Day, cover notes to *Louis Becke*).

²⁰ Under the Robertson Land Act of Free Selection, property around Byron could be had for one pound per acre, of which only five shillings needed to be put down (*Time and Tide* 15-16).

imagine anything worse than living out the rest of her life with him in the assistant lighthouse keeper's cottage, barely thirty yards from her parents' home. The engagement therefore is being thrust upon her and as the engagement party looms Lucinda hasn't quite been able to wriggle out of this unwanted huge new commitment.

Mrs. Dorothy Hunter (late 50s). Lucinda's mother. And like her daughter, she is not a typical, subservient sea captain's (later lighthouse keeper's) wife. In fact 'Dotty' as her family only half-jokingly call her, is a (hyper)active member of several local societies including the Theosophicals, and the Spiritualists, where she displays in frequent séances, an uncanny ability to get in touch with 'the other side'. She also plays piano for a jazz band which tours around the Northern Rivers, playing mostly in pubs and community halls (raising funds for charity). Dorothy also plays improvised music on the piano for the silent films shown at Byron's Literary Institute: an all-purpose cinema, meeting place and community hall. It is easy to see where Lucinda gets her crazy/manic energy from.

Berenice (Berny) Armstrong. 30-ish. The same age as Lucinda, Berny is a typical country girl of the time. Brought up on a dairy and banana farm, she has milked cows, confronted pests and weeds, cut timber, butchered her own meat, shot pigs and wallabies, kept chooks and grown all her own fruit and vegetables virtually since she could walk. In fact, Berny's dad had her riding a pony before she could technically stand upright. She remains an expert horse breaker. Like Lucinda, Berny dreams of liberation from the limitations of her rural backwater. She doesn't dislike the country life but knows something is missing and Lucinda's apparently dazzling progress in Sydney is a constant reminder of her own stuck predicament. However, unlike Lucinda, Berny lacks both the financial means and the education to do much about her current situation. To overcome this she gambles all her nest egg on shipping three tons of butter on the Wollongbar to Sydney (and ultimately to England where Byron Bay butter is a prized item in the High Street). Alas, this atypically risky gesture by Berny is destined to end in grief.

Monroe Dalgety. 40-ish. Monroe is one of Lucinda's city pals who has sailed up from Sydney with her travelling party on the S.S. Wollongbar a few nights ago – all travelling together for her engagement celebration on the Cape. Monroe is a charming but slightly dodgy character who claims to have worked as a journalist and magazine writer, but is secretly on the run from agents of a powerful Sydney bookie reputed to be connected to Squizzy Taylor. Lucinda is attracted to his debonair, gallows humour and for Monroe's part, the feelings are more than reciprocated. He is in love with her but can't seem to ever quite admit it. A confirmed bachelor, it may well be that Monroe is deep down, also a commitment-phobe. Meanwhile, true feelings suppressed, he offers Lucinda a sympathetic (if not completely reliable) shoulder to cry on, and is someone to whom she can unload the anxiety of her looming marriage to Reg. Like Reg, Monroe is old enough to have fought in the War but accounts of his military exploits keep changing and seem frankly contradictory. Capt. Hunter distrusts him on sight and treats him with a barely disguised contempt.

Other Minor Characters include **Molly (19)** an Irish serving girl who works the drinks and party food. Here the heterochrony of 1921 is maintained by engaging sympotic space (sense of taste) with typical menu items from the period that might include lamingtons, Anzac biscuits, corned ox tongue and roast beef sandwiches, plum pudding, savoury anchovies on toast, apple pie etc.²¹

Also present would be at least **Two Musicians: Tom and Betty Thurgood (40s)**. This couple are regulars with Dotty Hunter's jazz band, and together the trio provide both dance and background music for the party, including 'sing-a-longs of popular numbers round Dotty's piano (with her 'shandy' [a mix of lemonade and beer] perched permanently on a little shelf to the right of her piano). Tom and Betty are also both excellent tango dancers (the latest craze sweeping Europe from South America), and perhaps coach audience members through some simple tango routines. Meanwhile, the minor characters also make poignant asides on the main action – in the manner of Baynot and Mutton's interventions into the action in Jack Hibberd's *Dimboola* (1969). These two were an early example of the practice of site-specific theatre salting characters in among the audience. In *Dimboola* Baynot and Mutton critique the whole event with lewd asides while essentially freeloading on the food and drink provided. Tom may also double as a Morse code operator when news comes, via the telegraph of the evolving emergency with the S.S. Wollongbar.

Storyline

According to the generic orthodoxy, the main action of the play focuses on a troubled father/daughter/son-in-law triangle. In this case, it is more a question of a troubled father/daughter/daughter-in-law triangle.

Prologue: Bus ride to the lighthouse.

At the historic Byron Railway Station the gathering audience present their formally printed invitations to Dotty and board a double-decker bus (almost reminiscent of Sydney busses of the 1920s). Here they commence a detoured ride up to the engagement party while passing points of historic interest along the way. Dotty, gives a potted history of Byron's key moments reminiscent of Forced Entertainment's *Nights In This City*. He she applies a psychogeographic approach: imposing story on place as, like a human crystal radio set, she 'channels' characters from the past who ('through' Dotty) give graphic descriptions of the main events in the formation of the town. The bus ride finally delivers the audience to the lighthouse proper, just in time for Capt. Hunter's formal speech of welcome delivered from its first floor ramparts and relayed to the crowd below by Reg using semaphore. This was an early form of text messaging involving coloured flags and a lot of arm movements between parties visible to each other. With field glasses and binoculars information could be sent over many miles (or battleships).

²¹ *Time and Tide* contains a Menu card fro dinner on the Wollongbar's sister ship the S.S. Orara (94).

Act One: Setting the scene.

After the audience are taken down to the Main Cottage we hear more about the pending nuptials between Lucinda and Reginald. But we ‘overhear’ that Lucinda feels under pressure from her parents to “settle down”, and now deeply regrets that (in a fit of near apoplectic stress and anxiety), she agreed to go through with it all. Reg, for his part, comes across as a decent enough fellow quite happy to make Lucinda his wife, have a family, and settle down to the domestic routines of an assistant lighthouse keeper and one day (soon probably) taking over his father-in-law as head keeper of the light. All of which equates to a form of living hell for the now metropolitanised and crypto-suffragette, Lucinda. Meanwhile, we find that Monroe himself carries a flame for her. The First Act climaxes with Lucinda re-encountering her old friend Berenice. All this information is carried in short scenes deployed through the various audience groups in different rooms.

Act Two: What’s really going on.

After a short break that allows the audience to mingle and swap gossip, the second Act reveals that feelings between Lucinda and Berny have only increased since they last met, demonstrating a classic example of “absence making the heart grow fonder”. Berny reveals all her financial hopes are riding on a cargo of butter from her farm which was loaded this morning on the S.S. Wollongbar for shipment to Sydney; and from there by refrigerated steamship to the Old Country, where Byron Bay butter is a prized item. Lucinda realises this would give her dear friend sufficient financial freedom to set up a life of her own, further facilitating any future relationship them. Throughout this scene, as the passions rise in inverse proportion to the barometric pressures, constant references are made by Capt. Hunter to a troubling plunge in the readings. A big storm is on its way.

Act Three: The storm.

After another short interval for refreshments the storm finally breaks (an illusion enhanced by lightning and sound effects (hail on roof, wind etc.)). Wet costumes and a lot more shouting add to the building crisis. In the heat of the moment Lucinda calls it off with Reg – just as word arrives from the jetty (via Tom’s telegraph in a back room) that the Wollongbar is breaking free from its moorings under the growing and relentless North Easterly gale. The captain of the ship has decided to make a run into the bay to stop her from foundering on the beach. Reg, his hopes and dreams in tatters, volunteers immediately to rejoin his old crew and face whatever the storm might throw against them. Lucinda begins to regret her harsh rebuff as he heads heroically out into pelting rain and hail. As the party waits with baited breath, updates arrive by telegraph of the dramatic action taking place in the bay. Tom, through telegram after telegram, delivers a blow by blow description of the fate of the Wollongbar. A sudden crisis in the lighthouse itself, the kerosene (paraffin) fed lamp is in danger of going out! Capt. Hunter calls for volunteers among “his guests” to hurry up there with him to help lift more supplies to the top (Reg has mismanaged his stock taking responsibility on his first day). At the same time, as the Wollongbar crashes unstopably towards the beach, Capt. Hunter is struck by lightning. Unfortunately he had been getting a

better view of events via his telescope at the top (while relaying each act in the drama to the audience helping lift kerosene tins up the internal staircase).²²

Act Four: Aftermath

Capt. Hunter is shaken needless to say, but not stirred, and continues to rail against his daughter's 'betrayal'. While Berny's financial independence, in the form of three tons of butter, is currently mixing with the rest of the cargo of bananas and bacon washed up on Bilongil Beach. Reg is, at first, mistakenly thought to have been critically injured in the sinking. However he soon returns to the lighthouse, battered but basically okay. All he had to do at the end was jump overboard into about three feet of surf.

As Capt. Hunter is rushed to hospital by horse and cart, the events of this turbulent night reach their conclusion. Reg reluctantly accepts that Lucinda and Berny are going to move back to Sydney together -- for a time anyway. They will be followed by Monroe looking for a place to stay (a refuge from his relentless debt collectors.) Finally, Dotty by way of following her husband down to the hospital packs the audience into the bus for a lieft back to where they started from (the railway station).

Epilogue: The Bus Ride Home

On the way down, stepping out of the heterochrony of the play and back into an indeterminate present, Dotty fills everyone in on the fates that befell the characters after that fateful night. She explains how Berny and Lucinda remained together and eventually returned from Sydney to run Berny's family farm after her own parents passed away. Monroe was found in a shallow grave on St. Kilda beach in Melbourne. And Dotty herself was reconciled to her daughter after Capt Hunter finally died of a heart attack. Reg himself never married, but remained in touch with Lucinda and Berny and even helped out when they adopted a child together.

The ride home goes past the carpark overlooking the wreck of the S.S. Wollongbar as it stands today: its rudder and rear superstructure, and sometimes its boilers rising above the low tides off Bilongil beach. It still sits there as marker for today's board riders catching waves around it. Finally, Dotty draws everyone's attention to the Julian Rocks lying a little further out into the bay. In a moving speech she draws parallels between the story of Lucinda and Berny and the Dreamtime legend of the wife fleeing by boat with her lover from a jealous husband. Enraged, the husband threw a spear that sank their canoe, turning the lovers and their boat into the two rocks we see today (another form of shipwreck). Nevertheless, Dotty reassures us, these lovers from different clan groups, happily remain joined together – just under the waterline...

²² Lightning strikes were a not uncommon workplace hazard for lighthouse keepers and one such took place in 1920 (*Time and Tide* 59-60)

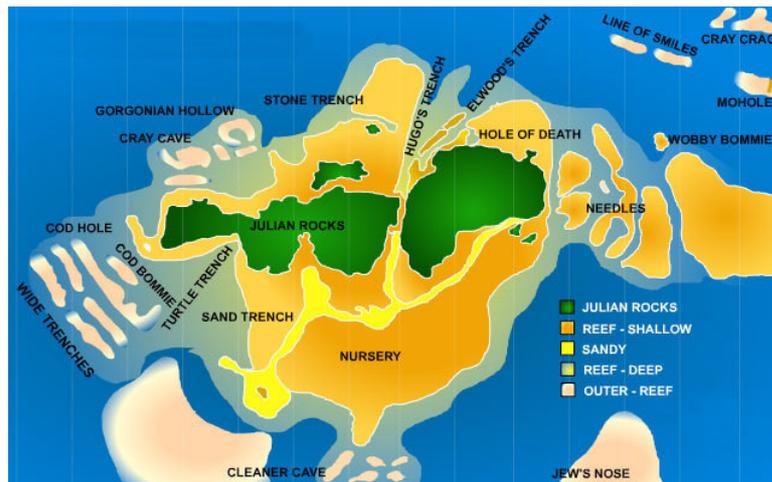


Figure 11. Map of Julian Rocks showing two islets joined under the waterline.



Figure 12. The Julian Rocks today. A marine park and refuge for sea life.²³

²³ This and other images are available at http://www.google.com.au/search?q=julian+rocks+marine+reserve&hl=en&client=safari&sa=X&tbo=u&rls=en&tbn=isch&source=univ&ei=bB_AUJDsFs2jiAeWsICgCg&ved=0CF8QsAQ&biw=1112&bih=806

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